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ABSTRACT

Because an English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teacher in Pennsylvania observed from the intake questionnaires completed by her students that many ESL students lack short- and long-term goal-setting skills, she undertook an action research project to help ESL students develop the short- and long-term goal-setting skills needed for educational, personal, and career application. She established personal interview sessions with students, had students begin journals, and conducted question-and-answer sessions. She also developed activities to improve students' listening skills. The activities were designed to be sensitive to the different cultural backgrounds of the class's Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern students. During the course of the 6-week project, the student processed the procedures for setting short-term and long-term goals. At the beginning of the project, students could not seem to mesh educational and personal goals. As they worked on specific goals, however, they began to see the relationship between career, educational, and life goals. Students' independence in filing out forms and telling the instructor what they needed to learn in English also improved. (Appendixes constituting approximately two-thirds of this document contain the following five items: a list of strategies for setting goals and objectives; an intake questionnaire; a planning questionnaire; four single-goal short-term activity records; and a listening skills exercise.) (MN)

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PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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A Learning From Practice Project

Action Research Monograph

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Teaching Short-Term and Long-Term Goal-Setting to ESL Students for Educational, Personal, and Career Application

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PRODUCT

"Pennsylvania Action Research Network:
Staff Development Through
Six Professional Development Centers"

Project Number 099-99-9010
July 1998-June 1999

Project Director
Dr. Gary Kuhne
Assistant Professor and Regional Director of Adult Education
The Pennsylvania State University

Note: Action Research is a process of systematic inquiry credited to Kurt Lewin who popularized it in the U.S. in the 1940"s. Today it is considered a system of qualitative research. Typical of action research, none of the individual projects in this monograph series claims to have generalizable application beyond the specific project described. However, each monograph report can serve to be illustrative, instructive and provides the potential for replication in other locations. For a level of generalizability, it is recommended that the reader seek common patterns in the monograph reports in this series, and the wider literature, or contact the Action Research Network for assistance in this.

I. ABSTRACT

An ongoing problem I observed in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom evolved from the intake form of Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 Adult Education. (Appendix A) On the form is the question: "What is your educational/personal goal?" Invariably, potential students give a stock answer: "To learn better English." If the instructor did not do the intake form of a particular student, this information is too general. It was also a comment about this question that I heard at workshops, conferences, and observed on the Internet that led me to consider the question more closely.

As I observed my students, I felt they did have personal objectives and goals. Many of the Advanced and Intermediate students could tell me what these goals were. What I discovered, through conversation with them, is they did not have short-term and long-term learning goals. They also did not seem to process how learning one procedure would enable them to learn yet another more advanced procedure. Since I had been a student of individual learning styles I decided to incorporate how a student studies and what way a student likes to study in a Planning Questionnaire. (Appendix B) As a first step in gathering information and to help students feel at ease for the major part of the project I explained what the project was going to be and asked for their assistance. I had a very willing group. Individually, I went over each form with the student so that there would be no difficulty in understanding the ranking or the % rating systems. Students appeared to approve of the purpose of the first form. Students also said no voluntary participation form was necessary since they were interested in the project for their own knowledge and I would use no names.

My original concern - why students were studying English- remained the foremost focus so I continued with the project. I broke it into small sessions over a six-week initial period.

II. PROBLEM

This class could be deemed multi-level with students testing on the Best test as Advanced or Intermediate. There were no Beginner Level students in this class. At the time this study began, the majority of the students were males, but the class mixture was a blend of Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern with no one dominant group.

With the class's cooperation we set up personal interview sessions; journal keeping as

reflected in Forms A-B-C-D (Appendices C, D, E, F); and question and answer sessions. The students were enthusiastic and cooperative. I should mention that the students also reflected an economic difference. What impact that had, I will refer to later in the monogram.

For the most part, my students in English work on areas they feel they need such as reading, writing, and speaking English. However, they forgot about listening skills. It was decided, as a group, we would get everyone on one task and to initiate an understanding of goal setting by doing a model. Each student had to be responsible enough and comfortable enough to say "I don't understand you." We had to do this procedure slowly and politely because of our different cultural backgrounds.

At first, we began with writing our short-term personal goals since these students had already indicated they had these goals. What surprised me in this research is that students had long-term personal goals, i.e., to speak, write, read, and understand English well enough to go to college; but they did not bother with planning the short-term goals that would help them reach the long-term goal. Once we began to sketch these in step-by-step and once we kept a journal, the students understood what they needed to do. Some students grasped the concept immediately; others took a few weeks. Eventually, we understood each other. Now the goals could be applied to "learning "English.

III. PLANNING

A. Problem Defined

My initial concern was to develop a student's ability to set a goal for learning that aspect of English that would most benefit the individual whether it was speaking, listening, writing, reading, learning idioms, or studying vocabulary. I also wanted to maximize class time. I found I was meeting with students before and after class to clarify', to define strategies, to recommend materials. This procedure worked well and kept me on task and focused with each student. At the time I began the project there were ten students.

B. Significance of the problems in the field of ESL

The ability to know future goals and to develop a plan of operation is important to all adults. It is especially important to immigrants and peoples of other races so their jobs do not remain the low- level stagnant jobs that can damage the spirit. I wanted ESL students to progress,

enhance self- esteem, and gain confidence.

My perception is that students who write well; who can speak to a mixed group of language users and be understood; who can laugh at their mistakes without feeling inferior are citizens who will be a success in life.

C. Intervention

1. The first step of intervention was a learning process for me but was a result of the forms developed in Appendices C-D-E-F. The Planning Questionnaire (Appendix B) was developed first and eventually affected how I taught these adults. Because students may enter and exit this class at their convenience, we defined short-term as a daily to weekly situation. Long -term meant anything more than three weeks.

2. The English goal the students wanted to try first was listening to spoken English. (Please note that these students spoke well enough to be understood, but with more accented English than they wished.) Through our discussions about their questionnaire, it was felt we should try tapes, teacher, and fellow students. Since the class had been requesting I read the same thing another student had read, I realized pronunciation was important. This was an area of study we emphasized. Students were advised to write reactions in their journals. They frequently indicated, "too fast," when they listened to a tape and filled in blank spaces with words. Sometimes it was "too soft." Where a word was missed and they could not fill in the blank, the students wrote "unclear." Sometimes they relied on each other to obtain the words for the blanks. They found this unsatisfactory because they would then miss the next word. (Appendix G) Without realizing what was occurring, they began to change their responses and this was more positive. Students began to say, "I tried," "I did it," "Jon helped by reading slowly."

3. Another step we used was how planning could be done as homework if we chose a story or paragraph or a news article and practiced at home. Students could then individualize a goal and evaluate how effective it was. This was not totally successful because of attendance. Some students were working shifts, which meant one week they could be in class, but the following week they were working. There was then no feedback except in journal entries. No demonstrations came from the working group on a consistent basis.

4. Another aspect of the intervention was the personal interview after a unit, i.e., the listening unit, had been completed. In this type of interview, usually 15 minutes, the student input

was critical because the student was not only evaluating the education goal of self, but also the classroom goal and the teaching goal. In fact, this became extremely valuable and obviously important to the student because the student considered the time to talk such a priority that work time would have been forfeit. Fortunately, we could schedule time either before or after class and maintained the personal interview as a major source of sharing.

D. Baseline

The baseline was a combination of the discussion/personal interview and the self-assessment form. By the time students had spent over six weeks in assessing their educational goals and filling out forms; keeping a personal journal; and discussing goals with the teacher; they had processed the procedures for setting short-term and long-term goals. They could not seem to mesh educational and personal goals in the beginning forms, but, as they worked on specific goals, they began to see the relationship and significance. Their independence in filling out their forms and specifics in telling the instructor what they needed to learn in English was to be the success.

IV. ACTION

A. Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through pre- and post-questionnaires, personal interviews, application of listening skills, student journal entries, and final preparation of a plan in answer to the question: "What is your educational/personal goal?"

B. Data Collected

The data yielded the following results: in the Planning Questionnaire (both before and after the intervention), students were willing to indicate rankings and percentages, but in the post-questionnaire a few students wrote qualifiers or comments. For example, in listening skills the student now wants someone who pronounces words well. Once objectives and goals had been explained, more students could write goals precisely. They even included reviews as part of the goals. All of these students (100%) felt comfortable about goal setting after teaching, demonstrating, and conferencing were learned. However, many were still hesitant to say the long-term goal would be done. For example, the young student who wants to attend college also has family responsibility hence does not foresee an easy path to his goal. All this tells me is we must be

available for different types of intervention such as teaching about scholarships, grants, etc.

V. EVALUATION/REFLECTION

The intervention was a success. In addition to their ability in organizing their goals, I noticed increased confidence in my students. They introduced new students who entered the class later into the pattern of goal setting. However, some students also taught the instructor something. Not all goals are the same. Some students asked me if their goals differed from mine for them, could they learn what they needed or wanted. In reality, they were preparing their own individual educational plan.

One of the biggest problems I had was attendance fluctuation. As referred to earlier in the paper I also had an economic difference wherein some students were in the United States to learn computers while others were struggling at low-level entrance jobs in spite of the fact that they had advanced degrees in their country of origin. This caused minor problems with goal setting because not all could realize their goal as soon as they wanted to do so.

One student had met a long-term goal and was attending college as well as attending class. This student was totally focused and had goals set in place. She used the resources in the community. This was advantageous because that student influenced others in the group. Students who did not need to work also had more time with the goals, and I could see a difference in journal entries and in their weekly forms.

What I would do further, in addition to the methods already employed, would be to tape the personal interviews. Although I had notes, I would rather have had the suggestions and evaluations on tape for reference.

What I observe now is a group of adults who can break events into short-term and long-term goals. They also question what they are studying and of what use it will be to them. I plan to incorporate short-term and long-term goal setting in all my teaching and demonstrate how this is done in personal, educational, and career areas.

REFERENCES

- *Day One Planning Questionnaire* (EFL/ESL) by Nick Miller. Internet via Netscape. No date. Obtained winter 1998. (Permission granted by Nick Miller to use any of the form or modify it. I modified it.)

- Comments from esl@literacy.nifl.gov. regarding developing language learning plans. FinnMiller;oresl@Literacynet. org. SylvanlRainwater;rly-zdo4.mx.aol.com. goal setting. "Goal setting is recognized as one of the four essential elements in enhancing a learner's efficacy in a subject... Goal setting is a component in removing levels of anxiety and phobia and leads to the motivation to achieve, often beyond their levels of expectation." Quoted message from NIFL ESL list serve, Nov. 24, 1998@12:20 P.M.

- PA-ARN: Project #99-80111. July 1997-June 1998 Project Director Dr. Gary Kuhne; Gayle Y. Miles, Instructor. (Forms are similar. They are also similar to many ESL and Learning Styles questionnaires.)

- GRAMMAR: STRATEGIES AND PRACTICE, ADVANCED. Sandra K. Briggs. San Mateo, CA ScottForesman, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers. (The introduction included an explanation of goals and objectives that was used with my students. This is paraphrased to fit these students but definitely from Sandra K. Briggs. See Basis for Definitions.)

STRATEGIES FOR SETTING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

Good students set goals and objectives. Goals are what you want to accomplish. Objectives are specific things you want to learn. In order to set goals and objectives, you will need to ask yourself these and other questions.

What about the English language do I already know well? What areas do I need to work on? In looking over the lessons in my book, what do I see that is new? What do I see that I should review? How will I be using the material I learned after I finish this book? Where will I get answers to my questions after I finish this unit?

After you think about these questions, write a personal goal for your study of the English language. For example, in your study of English, your goal could be to feel confident with pronunciation. It could be to be able to edit your written work for correct grammatical usage. Next, identify some specific goals that you want to accomplish. For example, an objective in studying English could be to use idioms in your conversation.

Set up goals and objectives for yourself. Discuss them with a classroom partner. Are your goals and objectives useful, achievable? Make revisions in your objectives, if necessary.

Paraphrased from GRAMMAR: STRATEGIES AND PRACTICE Advanced Sandra J. Briggs, San Mateo, California
ScottForesman, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers

LANCASTER LEBANON INTERMEDIATE UNIT 13

Lancaster Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13
1998-99 Adult Education

Class#/Site:		Contract #s:		Subject(s):	Wr, SS, Sc, L+A, M
				BEST Form:	B / C
Instructor:		Pretest Assessment		Pretest score:	

Please Print Today's Date: _____

Name: _____ Social Security #: _____
Last First

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip Code: _____ Phone Number: _____

School District in which you live: _____ Sex: ❑ Male ❑ Female

Which of the following groups do you most identify with:
❑ American Indian ❑ Asian ❑ Black ❑ Hispanic ❑ White

Date of birth: _____
Month/Day/Year

Your age: _____

Household Status: ❑ Single ❑ Married ❑ Supported by family/friends
❑ Living in a group home ❑ Homeless
How many children do have (under age 18)? _____

Are you working?
❑ Yes - Full/Part-time (circle one)
❑ Unemployed/seeking employment
❑ No, not available for work

Last grade of school: _____

Are you:
❑ Receiving Welfare ❑ An Immigrant
❑ Handicapped ❑ Enrolled in other Federal Programs
❑ Institutionalized ❑ SSI
❑ Using a Medical Card ❑ A Displaced Homemaker
❑ Receiving Food Stamps

How well do you speak/understand English?
❑ Very well
❑ Well
❑ Not well

How did you find out about this program?

_____

_____

What is your educational/personal goal?

_____

_____

How long do you plan on studying in our program?

_____

_____

In case of emergency, contact:

Name_____ Address/Phone_____

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Submit white copy to office; retain yellow copy for student file

Appendix B

PLANNING QUESTIONNAIRE	
Name:	Class:
Address:	Phone:
Rate your answers 0-5, 0 being the lowest.	
WHY DO YOU WANT TO STUDY ENGLISH?	
	0 1 2 3 4 5
To meet foreigners, ie. ESL students	
To work with English speakers	
To study with English speakers	
To travel abroad	
As a hobby	
Other	
WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO STUDY?	
	0 1 2 3 4 5
Conversation	
Grammar	
Listening	
Pronunciation	
Speaking	
Spelling	
Technical terms	
TOEFL	
Vocabulary	
Writing	
HOW DO YOU LIKE TO STUDY?	
	0-25% 25-50% 50-75% 75%-100%
By yourself	
One partner	
Small groups	
Big groups	
With videos	
With cassettes	
With books	
With papers	
With pictures	
With computers	
Listen to teacher	
Listen to students	
Speaking	
Free conversation	
Low structure	
High structure	
Drills	

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Appendix B

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR LEVEL?
High Intermediate Advanced Native Level
WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES?
WHAT IS YOUR JOB?
COMMENTS:

Appendix C

SINGLE GOAL SHORT TERM ACTIVITY RECORD

Form A

Objective (short term)

_____

_____

Date	Activity
Dec. 16	_____
Dec. 17	_____
Dec. 21	_____
Dec. 22	_____
Dec. 23	_____

Student: Date

_____

Appendix D

Form B

Write your goal for today's class.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Did you meet your goal? Yes No

If the answer is yes, was it because of something you did or because of something someone else did, such as another student or the instructor?

_____
_____
_____
_____

If the answer is no, was it because of something you did or was it because of something someone else did?

_____
_____
_____

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Appendix E

			Form C			
			Short Term			
		Personal		Educational		Career
		Yes No		Yes No		Yes No
I have plans for today.						
I have plans for tomorrow.						
I have plans for the week.						
I have plans for the month.						
			Long Term			
		Personal		Educational		Career
		Yes No		Yes No		Yes No
I have plans for the year.						

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Appendix F

Form D

Planning for the short term would be useful for me because:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Planning for the long term would be useful for me because:

_____
_____
_____
_____

It would be difficult for me to plan in the short term because:

_____
_____
_____

It would be difficult for me to plan in the long term because:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Student: Date:

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Appendix G

Listening Skills Exercise

A. Pronunciation of vocabulary led by instructor with students repeating.

B. Pre-reading of the paragraph by the instructor. Group reading when students were comfortable with the reading.

C. Silent reading of the paragraph. Answer pronunciation questions.

D. Another reading of the paragraph by the instructor.

E. Distributing a copy of the paragraph with words missing.

F. Taped reading with a different voice. Students fill in the missing words.

G. Student reading of the paragraph with the words inserted.

H. Evaluation of the listening assignment.